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HOW MUCH DO I STUDY THE BIBLE, AND HOW?

RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION FROM WORKING PASTORS.

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The Bible is with me the great subject of study. I give to it from two to five hours daily, sometimes more, exclusive of the time given to teaching it to others. The kinds of study are varied. I study it sometimes in the original languages and sometimes in the Revised English Version. My study is now that of a whole book to determine its structure, and the course of the thought in it; now, the careful exegesis of special passages; again, to find in the book the material for the determination of the isagogical facts relating to it; again, to determine the evidences the book contains on which to base a literary criticism of the book; now, to trace the history of the chosen nation, or the life of some holy man of God, so far as either of them appears in the book; and again, to discover the great spiritual and religious truths presented in the book. S. B.

The theological seminary gave me a knowledge of almost everything save the thing most essential—the sacred Scriptures. To my class biblical theology was unknown, the Bible was without historical perspective, and a verse from the pessimism of Ecclesiastes was as decisive as an utterance of the Son of God. Only when a man emerges from this view does he reach the real sources of power and touch the river of God which is full of water.

One man's method may be another man's ruin; but my own is as follows:

I endeavor to keep constantly at work on two books of the

Bible,—or rather two periods in biblical history,—one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament. This involves two separate lines of study, which converge and intersect in surprising fashion. This last year I have worked at the period of the Exodus, and at the period covered by the first half of the book of the Acts. (For the last I have found very helpful the outlines published by the American Institute of Sacred Literature.) I have avoided commentaries and harmonies and homiletic helps, reading first the original material, then reading the versions in modern languages, and then studying the period from the historical standpoint. I was surprised to discover what is doubtless familiar to others—that Exodus is the Old Testament book of Acts, and that the period of the Acts is the time of the Christian Exodus.

The year previous I studied the life of Isaiah and the life of Christ. Here also the interlacing of the two subjects was remarkable. (George Adam Smith's "Isaiah" is the finest example I know of what wealth may come to the preacher through the steadfast pursuit of the historical method).

I have never been able to accomplish anything by giving the famous "one half hour a day." That sounds so easy and is so hard. I give a whole morning or evening to the work twice in the week. This is woefully little, but more is impossible.

I never study the Bible with a view to making sermons. The homiletic purpose vitiates the historical study, while on the contrary, the historical study leads into the richest homiletic fields. To grasp the leading "motives" of a period in the revelation is to thrust one's roots into inexhaustible supplies. To reconstruct mentally and spiritually a part of the sacred history is to construct potentially a hundred sermons. Such knowledge is like Aaron's rod that budded when "laid up before the Lord." The word of God is alive. It is given to us not as a graven granite block, but as a forest is given to the botanist and the ornithologist.

When I began to preach, the "word-study" of the Bible seemed to me most important. It certainly is essential to know the meaning of such epoch-making words as *faith*, *parousia*, *aion*.

This, however, would be far more important if the Bible were a scientific treatise or a legal document. Next I became interested in the "study of the Bible by books." This must ever be a source of endless delight. But both these methods lead up to a "study of periods," in what is at the same time a historic evolution and a divine revelation. To know the formative periods in Judaism and the birth-period of Christianity is to apprehend, with ever growing distinctness and ever increasing joy, Christ himself.

W. H. P. F.